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# **Party agency and the religious-secular cleavage in post-Communist countries: The case of Romania**

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## **Abstract**

Research focusing on several post-Communist countries has found evidence of social cleavage effects on political behaviour similar to those found in Western Europe. In some post-Communist countries, however, social cleavage effects appear far weaker (if at all). To understand why this is the case, I perform a case study of Romania, focusing on the religious-secular cleavage. Drawing upon research that emphasizes the role of parties in forming cleavages, I argue that the reason for the absence of social cleavage effects is due to party competition for the same group of voters by parties from opposing ends of the ideological spectrum. By shifting their parties' positions, some parties have prevented the appearance of cleavages by shaping individuals' perceptions of the parties, and in doing so, have even altered individuals' own left-right self-placements.

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Many scholars have examined whether the social cleavage approach, as has been applied to the study of party systems in advanced industrial democracies, is applicable to the party systems of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). While some have challenged the utility of the social cleavage approach when examining the party systems of CEE (Elster, Offe, and Preuss, 1998; Lawson, 1999), the literature has moved toward consensus that the social cleavage approach can be adapted and applied to party systems in CEE (for extensive reviews, see Whitefield, 2002; Evans, 2006). Despite this consensus, cleavage effects on political behaviour have not appeared in every country in CEE (e.g. White, Rose and McAllister, 1997, pp. 65; McAllister and White, 2007), particularly in countries with legacies of harsh repression and clientelism, which produce clientelistic and personalistic—as opposed to programmatic—politics (see the arguments in Kitschelt et al., 1999; Whitefield, 2002, pp. 193; Evans, 2006, pp. 258-259). It remains to be seen, however, whether cleavages in these CEE countries are truly absent or whether parties have failed to represent cleavages in the same way as parties elsewhere in CEE have done. If parties do not represent cleavage groups in the same way, is this because they do not mobilise voters along social group lines or because the patterns of party competition blur the appearance of cleavage effects?

This study seeks to further our understanding of why cleavage effects have not appeared in those CEE countries where such effects appear absent. Drawing from the ‘top-down’ perspective within social cleavage theory, which stresses the agency of political parties in the formation of cleavages (Sartori, 1969; Przeworski and Sprague, 1986; Torcal and Mainwaring, 2003; Enyedi, 2005), I argue that the reason for the appearance or absence of cleavage effects is due to patterns of electoral competition among party elites. Many parties in CEE have provided unstable and sometimes ideologically inconsistent electoral platforms from one election to the

next, with some parties from opposing ends of the ideological spectrum competing for and winning support from the same groups of voters. As a result of this party competition, the definitions of left and right become blurred, leading the effects of social group identities on political behaviour to appear at some times, but not others.

In order to test this argument, I examine the religious-secular cleavage in Romania, a country in which the effects of social group identities do not appear as clearly as elsewhere in CEE (e.g. McAllister and White, 2007, Figure 3) or as stable. The analyses below examine whether religiosity is associated with left-right self-placement, whether religiosity shapes party perceptions (and whether, in turn, these perceptions shape left-right self-placements), and whether party perceptions and left-right self-placements affect the degree to which religious individuals vote as a bloc. The results demonstrate the powerful impact that parties can have on the appearance of cleavage-based behaviour. In the results below, shifts in party stances on religious issues have persuaded some religious voters, affecting their perceptions of the party on a left-right scale, which in turn affect their own self-placements on that same scale. By extension, this change in self-placement and the larger blurring of the definitions of left and right created by multiple parties pursuing the same base of religious voters explains the instability of religiosity effects on left-right self-placements over time. Furthermore, by demonstrating that the positions taken by party elites affect the formation and stability of cleavage-based effects on political behaviour, these results also explain why some cleavages are visible in certain countries, but not others.

### **Voters, Party Agency, and the Appearance of Cleavage Effects**

Many studies of cleavages in the period immediately following the collapse of Communism predicted that stable cleavages would not form in CEE (Körösényi, 1991; Lewis,

1993; Lipset, 1994). In its broadest sense, this *tabula rasa* hypothesis held that people in the new democracies of CEE began their roles as voters without preconceived political ideologies, partisan preferences, or conscious social identities; as a result, social divisions like religion and class would not transform into partisan attachments. Scholars supporting the *tabula rasa* hypothesis pointed to the absence of party identifications among large portions of the electorate as evidence of their claims (see White, Rose, and McAllister, 1997; Miller, White, and Heywood, 1998; Rose and Mishler, 1998).

Yet evidence has emerged suggesting that social cleavages have strong effects on vote preferences for particular party families in several countries in CEE (Evans and Whitefield, 1995, 1998; Shabad and Slomczynski, 1999; Kitschelt et al., 1999; Vlachová, 2001; Tworzecki, 2003). While most of these studies have focused on class cleavages, the studies exploring the effects of religiosity have found that religious voters in these countries vote as distinctive blocs for the parties most associated with religious issues (Evans and Whitefield, 1995; Shabad and Slomczynski, 1999; White et al., 2000; Tworzecki, 2003), much like the religious-secular divide in Western Europe (Broughton and ten Napel, 2000; Elff, 2007). In many (though not all) CEE countries, religiosity also maps onto the left-right spectrum (McAllister and White, 2007) as it does in advanced industrial democracies (Knutsen, 1995; Norris and Inglehart, 2004; Freire, 2006). Even in those countries where cleavages like class once appeared absent, such cleavages have developed and stabilized over time (e.g. Hlousek and Kopecek, 2008; see also Colton, 2011). The appearance of cleavages has occurred in part because considerable ‘political learning’ has occurred, whereby voters have gradually acquired enough information about parties’ positions to begin voting along cleavage lines (Evans and Whitefield, 2006). Thus, a considerable body of work concludes that the social cleavage approach as applied to the party

systems of Western Europe can be applied to many of the party systems in CEE (see the reviews in Whitefield, 2002; Evans, 2006; Enyedi, 2008).

The findings of cleavage effects in some countries suggests that the *tabula rasa* hypothesis incorrectly attributes the appearance or absence of social cleavage effects to an electorate that is inexperienced with elections and recognising social cues. Instead, it is party elites who do not divide clearly along cleavage lines in those countries where religious and other cleavages appear absent among voters. In some CEE countries, party elites are divided along religious-secular lines much like voters (Kitschelt et al., 1999). Evidence from other countries, however, suggests that elites have not polarised clearly along religious-secular and other cleavage lines (e.g., White, Rose and McAllister, 1997, pp. 65; Kitschelt et al., 1999). Without clear divisions among elites, identifying which party is most representative of the issues that religious voters care about (and political learning—Evans and Whitefield, 2006) would become difficult.

Party identifiability is compounded in many countries by two related factors: weak parties and electoral volatility. In many parts of CEE, parties are programmatically weak<sup>1</sup> and are often focused around a charismatic individual (Kitschelt et al., 1999; Whitefield, 2002, pp. 193; Sakwa, 2003; Evans, 2006, pp. 258-259; Hlousek and Kopecek, 2008). These parties have made little effort to establish durable party identifications among voters (Cirtautas, 1994; White, Rose and McAllister, 1997; Tworzecki, 2003, pp. 198). This has resulted in parties that are often without ideological coherence and/or stable constituencies. These weak political parties have, in turn, led to high electoral volatility (Tavits, 2005, 2008b; Lewis, 2006; Epperly, 2011), with many parties competing in only one or two elections (Sikk, 2005). Such weakly defined parties and high electoral volatility have made the identification of religiously-oriented parties difficult.

In keeping with previous research noting the weakness and instability of parties in CEE, I argue that the reason for the appearance or absence of social group effects on political behaviour is due to competition among party elites to represent the same coveted groups of voters. This is particularly the case for the religious-secular cleavage. In a region where religious commitment is strong or experiencing revival (Froese, 2001; Greeley, 2003), there is intense competition among parties of both the left and right in some countries for the majority of voters who are concerned to some degree with religious issues. Some parties not originally targeting these voters have even switched their positions on religion over time so as to win religious voters' support. With several parties competing for religious voters' loyalties, the result of such a congested electoral space is that the definitions of left and right can become blurred and individuals have a difficult time sorting out which party(ies) best represent(s) religious (or secular) issues. When multiple parties compete to persuade certain groups of voters that they best represent a particular group's interests (such as religious issues) religious and other social group effects on political behaviour may appear absent—particularly when the definitions of left and right are unclear.

This argument accords with the literature stressing the agency of parties in aggregating interests and social groups, determining the issue and ideological content of elections (which includes such things as giving definition to the terms left and right), and ultimately in shaping the formation of cleavages (Schattschneider, 1960; Sartori, 1969; Przeworski and Sprague, 1986; Torcal and Mainwaring, 2003; Enyedi, 2005; Evans, 2006, pp. 246). According to this 'top-down' approach, the appearance of cleavage effects is determined by party elites who activate social identities, turning these social identities into political identities when such groups meet with their electoral interests. This perspective is reinforced by what we know about individuals'

responses to elite cues (Popkin, 1991; Zaller, 1992; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998) and the importance of parties' policy positions to individuals' vote choices (Tavits, 2008a; Elff, 2009). Admittedly, such an understanding of cleavages differs from foundational works in the study of social cleavages (e.g. Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Bartolini and Mair, 1990); however, this understanding is in keeping with newer perspectives that emphasize group-specific party appeals and group-specific political behaviour as being the fundamental aspects of cleavage politics, even if the behaviour of elites and/or voters changes over time (Enyedi, 2008). While an alternative approach views changes in cleavage effects as originating in changes to the social structure, and while changes in the cleavage structure may lead parties to change their strategies (the 'bottom-up' approach: see Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Rokkan, 1970; Rose, 1974; Valenzuela, Scully, and Somma, 2007), shifts in support for one party to another can only be explained by shifts in party elites' positions on such issues, as well as their campaign efforts to win these groups of voters' support. Without such party competition, religiosity effects would appear stable from one election to the next.

The top-down perspective has recently been applied in other contexts in order to explain changes in the cleavage patterns in those countries. For instance, Enyedi (2005) documents the ability of parties to transform their social bases of support with the example of Fidesz, which is an anti-Communist party that switched from an anti-clerical party of the left to a pro-family party of the right so that the party could form a government with parties of the right instead of a government consisting of parties belonging to the left. Examining the case of Chile, Torcal and Mainwaring (2003) show how the parties of the centre-left coalition (*Concertación*) have articulated a democracy-authoritarianism cleavage in order to defeat the party heirs to the Pinochet regime. Raymond and Arce (2011) show how the absence of an indigenous cleavage



for many years in Peru (which has a large indigenous population) was due to the absence of parties articulating indigenous issues. In reviewing the extensive literature on cleavage effects and party dealignment in Western Europe, Enyedi (2008, pp. 296) notes that much of the dealignment phenomenon is due to shifts in the parties' strategies and less to the declining relevance of social identities (see also Przeworski and Sprague, 1986; Elff, 2009). Readers familiar with the American political scene will recognise the evolution of racial issues (which began with elite articulation and later spread to the mass public, influencing voters' perceptions of the parties) as an example demonstrating top-down effects leading to the appearance of cleavage-like effects (Carmines and Stimson, 1989).

All of these works demonstrate that in defining the issue and ideological content of elections and making electoral appeals rooted in social group interests, parties are able to encourage (or prevent) the formation of political identities giving rise to cleavage-based effects on political behaviour. What remains to be seen, however, is the extent to which parties are able to shape the formation of cleavages. It could be that, in shaping the formation of cleavages, parties are able to (re-) define the content of elections (including such terms as left and right) by altering their positions and targeting new groups of voters supportive of those positions.

### **The Case of Romania**

Romania is a useful case for study in large part because the definitions of left and right have been contested, often blurred by the sort of party competition described above. Since democratisation, the ex-Communist Party of Social Democracy (PSD) has been the main fixture of the party system, winning the initial elections in 1990 and 1992, finishing second in 1996, and returning to power in 2000. Its main competitors on the right have been the National Liberal Party (PNL), the National Peasant and Christian Democratic Party (PNT-CD), and the

Democratic Party (PD).<sup>2</sup> These parties have competed with PSD along two major axes of competition. Socioeconomic issues form the primary axis of electoral competition—dividing those who have benefitted from market liberalisation from those who have suffered—while a secondary cultural dimension divides those who favour pluralist cultural liberalism from those with nationalistic sentiments (Datculescu, 1999). Parties of both the right and left have competed along the cultural axis for the support of religious voters, which has obfuscated the definitions of left and right. Like many other former communist parties in the region (Ishiyama, 1998), PSD has cooperated with nationalist parties like the Humanist Party (PUR, later renamed the Conservative Party in 2006) to contest this cultural axis, which has only blurred the definitions of left and right further.

The reason parties on both sides of the ideological spectrum compete for support among religious voters is because religion features prominently in Romanian society. Similar to other countries in CEE, religious institutions in Romania outlived Communism and continue to thrive in its wake (Ramet, 1995; Wittenberg, 2006). Although subservient under Communism, Church leaders have played an active role in Romanian politics since democratisation, promoting the Church as the embodiment of Romanian national identity (Stan and Turcescu, 2000), similar to the practise in other Orthodox countries (Enyedi, 2003; Mavrogordatos, 2003). With such an active clergy, and because most Romanians belong to the Romanian Orthodox Church, politicians are eager to cater to religious voters. Parties will often employ religious and national symbols and attempt to remain favourable within the eyes of the church by stating their support for the Church's self-defined role in society (Stan and Turcescu, 2005; Turcescu and Stan, 2005). Unlike countries such as Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic, however—which have stable policy dimensions with clearly defined policy spaces for moral traditionalism and other issues of

import to religious voters (Kitschelt et al., 1999)—religious issues have not been ‘owned’ (Petrocik, 1996) by any one particular political party, as Orthodoxy creates the political space in which parties of both the left and right are able to compete effectively for religious individuals’ support and many parties realise they must adopt stances that do not offend all religious voters in order to remain electorally viable. Such competition for religious voters’ support from both the right and the left has been facilitated by the weak development of the parties’ issue and ideological profiles relative to parties in Western Europe. This weak party development has further led parties of both the left and right to compete on religious issues (as part of the larger cultural issue axis) to win the support of religious voters.

In some sense then, with such a lack of policy consensus, the terms left and right may represent views towards the parties more than specific ideologies. When surveyed, most Romanians are able to locate themselves on a left-right scale; however, with such vague definitions of left and right, and with partisan competition for religious voters’ support from both sides of the ideological spectrum, the ideological self-placements of individuals may be distorted by party competition. Because of this competition and blurring of the definitions of left and right, individuals’ left-right self-placements and their perceptions of the parties on a left-right scale might follow elite patterns of political competition, with individuals identifying themselves on the same side of the left-right scale as the party they perceive to be representative of the issues with which they are most concerned. As a result, the religious-secular cleavage might not appear as clearly as in advanced industrial democracies.

Thus, with the overlapping issue and ideological content of electoral politics, Romania appears as an unlikely case for the appearance of religious-secular effects on political behaviour. However, with evidence suggesting that religious issues are contested to some degree by most

parties, there may in fact be a religious-secular divide in Romania that is masked by political competition by parties on both sides of the blurred ideological spectrum. The next three sections seek to determine whether religiosity affects political behaviour in Romania and whether parties have affected the appearance or absence of this political divide.

### **The Effect of Religiosity on Left-Right Self-Placement over Time**

The first analysis examines whether there is evidence of a stable religious-secular cleavage over time when looking at left-right self-placements. For this, I utilise the first two waves (1996 and 2004) of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) and supplement these with four waves of the World Values Survey (WVS), corresponding to the years 1993, 1998, 1999, and 2005. A model for each year is estimated separately using ordinary least squares linear regression. The dependent variable is respondents' self-placements on the left-right scale.<sup>3</sup>

Religiosity is measured as respondents' frequency of attendance of religious services, with values ranging from low to high frequency of attendance.<sup>4</sup> While frequency of attendance is an imperfect measure of religiosity, it is the best indicator because so many Romanians report being religious that the numbers giving the most religious responses for other measures constitute an overwhelming majority; frequency of attendance, however, varies substantially. Several control variables are included, yet are not presented in the interest of space. These include a measure of household income,<sup>5</sup> the urban-rural cleavage,<sup>6</sup> respondents' ages, gender,<sup>7</sup> whether a respondent has obtained a university education,<sup>8</sup> and union membership.<sup>9</sup>

*Table 1 about here*

Table 1 presents the standardized regression coefficients for the attendance variable (with robust t-statistics in parentheses) from each of the CSES and WVS surveys. Positive coefficients

indicate that more frequent church attendance is associated with more rightist self-placements, and negative coefficients indicate that more frequent attendance is associated with more leftist self-placements. The results show that the effect of religiosity is not a consistent effect across time that leads religious voters to identify with the ideological right as it is in most advanced industrial countries. While the coefficient for the church attendance variable has a positive, rightist effect in the early years following Romania's democratic transition, this effect weakens substantially in 1998. By 1999—and then again in 2005—this coefficient becomes negative, indicating that more frequent church attendance is associated with significantly more *leftist* self-placements. These results demonstrate that the effect of religiosity on left-right self-placements has not been stable over time, consistent with the literature cited above regarding the weak party development in countries like Romania. Because religiosity does not have consistent, statistically significant effects on left-right self-placements, some observers may (prematurely) conclude that the religious-secular cleavage is absent in Romania.

As I argue above, one potential reason for the weak, inconsistent relationship between religiosity and left-right self-placements is that religious adherents are being mobilised by ideologically disparate parties. This is certainly the case with PSD. Although clearly identified as a secular party in 1996, PSD underwent serious transformations in its electoral strategy following the party's defeat in those elections. Most famously, the president and leader of PSD, Ion Iliescu transformed his party's positions on economic liberalisation while in office from 2001-2004. Instead of reversing or slowing the pace of the weak economic reforms implemented by the previous PNT-CD-led government—as promised in Iliescu's 2000 campaign—Iliescu implemented extensive economic reforms that brought Romania closer to meeting the guidelines for market liberalisation set by the European Union (Pop-Eleches, 2001). More importantly,

however, while the government led by the Christian-Democratic PNT-CD came into controversy over its plans to return lands confiscated from the Greek Catholic Church under Communism (some of which had been given to the Romanian Orthodox Church), PSD was able to capitalize on the issue by reminding the Orthodox Church and its many followers of the party's record of support for the Church in the years since democratisation (Stan and Turcescu, 2000).

Additionally, to cope with challenges by the nationalist Greater Romania Party, PSD ramped up its nationalistic rhetoric, which included references to the traditions and beliefs identified with Romanian Orthodoxy, as well as general references to religious themes and traditional morality. In 2004, the incumbent PSD contested the elections as part of an electoral alliance with PUR, which has tried to position itself as the party of family values.

The competition for religious voters has intensified over time as PSD has intensified its appeals for religious voters' support. During and since the 2004 election campaign, Traian Băsescu—leader of the rightist coalition, the Truth and Justice Alliance (and eventually, president of Romania)—has been dogged by his morally permissive attitudes related to his stated support for homosexual rights and for the legalisation of prostitution (Stan and Turcescu, 2005). Although Băsescu used religious symbols and made clear allusions to his own faith in the 2004 campaign, PSD also made use of such symbols and has tried to position itself among religious voters as the party most closely in line with religious themes (including issues of Romanian identity linked to the revered position of the Orthodox Church) by attacking Băsescu and his co-partisans. The Patriarchate actively opposed morally permissive political stances on issues relating to sexuality (Turcescu and Stan, 2005), trying to portray Băsescu's stances on religious issues as contrary to Church doctrine. These partisan battles for religious voters' loyalties have continued since the 2004 elections.

Thus, in the years following that 1996 defeat, PSD has made a conscious effort to appear more traditionalist in its social values stances and less hostile to religion (Stan and Turcescu, 2005). Such shifts on the part of PSD have likely had significant effects on voters' perceptions of the parties, making PSD appear as a more viable contender among religious voters. While not featuring as prominently in the campaign as economic issues, the fact that issues of religion were discussed actively by the parties attests to the importance of winning this base of voters as perceived by party elites, who in turn sought to win this base of voters by providing cues to demonstrate that the party shared religious voters' values.<sup>10</sup> The efforts by PSD are very similar to the ways in which American political parties have contested the sort of cultural issues generally thought to be secondary to economic issues (Leege et al., 2002).<sup>11</sup>

*Table 2 about here*

These efforts by PSD to court religious voters seem to have paid off. Table 2 presents the religious composition of the party's vote in 1996 and 2004 using CSES data from 1996 and 2004. Respondents are categorised into those never attending religious services, those occasionally attending, and those frequently attending.<sup>12</sup> As one can see, PSD's support is more religious in 2004 than 1996: the share of the party's vote that never attends drops by roughly 11 percent, while the shares of occasional and frequent attendees increase by about five and six percent, respectively. The fact that PSD was attempting to attract religious voters in 2004 in addition to the parties of the right opens the possibility that the definitions of left and right became blurred by party competition. What remains to be seen, though, is whether PSD indeed had such effects on the definitions of left and right.

### **Religiosity, Party Perceptions, and Left-Right Self-Placements**

In order to demonstrate more conclusively that party competition has indeed affected individuals' left-right self-placements, one must first demonstrate that perceptions of the parties are affected by religiosity in ways that match party competition among elites. With the change in strategy by PSD—moving from a secular ex-Communist party to a party that emphasises its commitment to moral traditionalism and defending the Orthodox Church—there should be a perceptible change in how religious identifiers perceive the party if its campaign efforts have been successful. Using data from both waves of the CSES (corresponding with the elections of 1996 and 2004), I examine the effects of religiosity on two dependent variables: left-right self-placements and perceptions of PSD on a left-right scale. Both scales range from zero to ten, left to right. The same battery of control variables included in Table 1 is used.

While the argument put forth here emphasises the effects that changing party positions have on individuals' own left-right self-placements, individuals' own ideological positions often affect their perceptions of the parties (Granberg and Brent, 1980; Merrill, Grofman, and Adams, 2001), and so left-right self-placements may also affect perceptions of PSD. This leaves open the question of causal ordering: perceptions of the parties may affect individuals' self-placements on the left-right scale, but those same perceptions may be caused by individuals' own left-right self-placements. In order to address this reciprocal causation, I employ a three-stage least squares model estimated by seemingly unrelated regression (Zellner and Theil, 1962). Similar to two-stage least squares, this technique estimates a series of reduced-form equations, which use a set of exogenous explanatory variables to predict an endogenous dependent variable that is then used as an explanatory variable in the structural equation. Unlike two-stage least squares, both endogenous variables used here—left-right perceptions of PSD and left-right self-placements—are also treated as independent variables to predict one another. Because of the simultaneous



impact each endogenous variable has on the other, and because the same set of exogenous variables is included in both equations, seemingly unrelated regression is needed to estimate the cross-equation contemporaneous correlation in the error terms (that is, correlation between the error terms for both the equation predicting left-right perceptions of PSD and the equation predicting left-right self-placement).<sup>13</sup> By incorporating the covariance between the two models' error terms into the parameter estimates, seemingly unrelated regression addresses the simultaneity problems that arise from estimating each model separately.

*Table 3 about here*

The first striking findings in Table 3 are the coefficients associated with left-right self-placements and perceptions of PSD from the 2004 model. Perceptions of PSD have a positive effect on left-right self-placement, indicating that rightist perceptions of PSD lead to rightist self-placements, while those with leftist perceptions of PSD place themselves as being to the left. Left-right self-placement also has a positive effect on perceptions of PSD, indicating that those placing themselves to the right perceive the party as belonging to the right (and vice versa for those placing themselves to the left). In 1996, left-right self-placements have no effect on perceptions of PSD, while these perceptions similarly have no effect on left-right self-placements. The fact that party perceptions and self-placements influence one another in 2004 and not in 1996 is in keeping with the argument above. As PSD shifted its electoral strategy to target religious voters, some voters took notice and shifted their perceptions of the party and/or shifted their self-placements to reflect the new positions adopted by PSD on religious and nationality issues.

The findings regarding the effects of religiosity present the clearest evidence of PSD's effect on the appearance of the religious-secular cleavage. In 2004, attendance has a significant

effect on perceptions of PSD, but not left-right self-placements. In keeping with the argument above, the negative effect of attendance on perceptions of PSD suggests that PSD has effectively persuaded some of its supporters that the party best represents religious issues: more religious individuals perceive the party as being to the left (as indicated by the negative sign of the church attendance coefficient), and in turn place themselves to the left (as indicated by the positive sign of the PSD perceptions variable in the left-right self-placement equation).<sup>14</sup> Also in keeping with the argument above, there is no such effect apparent in 1996, prior to PSD's shift to attract religious voters: in 1996, attendance has a significant and positive effect on left-right self-placements, but not perceptions of PSD. The fact that attendance has no effect on left-right self-placements in 2004 demonstrates that PSD has influenced left-right self-placements primarily by altering individuals' perceptions of the party's position on religious issues.

In addition to demonstrating the influence that parties can have on the appearance of cleavage effects, these findings also appear to explain the unstable effects of the religious-secular cleavage noted above. Referring to Table 1, the rightist effect of attendance on left-right self-placements begins to strengthen though 1996, when the Christian Democratic PNT-CD surges to power. This effect weakens in 1998, during the period in which the Orthodox Church begins to criticize the governments' actions regarding the restoration of Church lands to the Greek Catholic Church, an action that soured relations with the Orthodox Church and its followers (Stan and Turcescu, 2000), and perhaps led individuals to realign their left-right self-placements. The relationship becomes insignificant (and negative) by 1999, the year before PSD returned to power (in part because of its nationalistic and pro-religious stances regarding the position of the Orthodox Church in society). While the relationship becomes positive (though insignificant) again in 2004, the relationship becomes negative (and significant) in 2005, likely in response to

portrayals of Bănescu and his right-leaning PNL as out-of-step with the average Romanian on issues of moral traditionalism and national identity. All of this suggests further that the appearance or absence religious-secular cleavage effects depend upon party agency.

### **The Effect of Religiosity on Vote Choice**

The analysis thus far has examined factors that ultimately should affect vote choices. This section examines whether the efforts of parties like PSD, whose effects on perceptions of the party and left-right self-placement were observed in Table 3, have actually affected vote choices. Specifically, I examine respondents' vote choices for the lower house (Chamber of Deputies), focusing primarily on the two major electoral blocs: the coalition parties of the right formed by PNT-CD in 1996 and PNL in 2004 (coded zero) versus PSD and its electoral allies (coded one).<sup>15</sup> The same control variables used in Table 3 are included. While this ignores some of the parties in a complex multiparty system, most of the partisan discussion of religious issues has been between these two electoral blocs.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Table 4 about here*

Table 4 presents the results using binary logistic regression. The results in model 1 for both the elections of 1996 and 2004 show that the religious-secular cleavage has played a role in shaping voting decisions between PSD and its main opponents of the right. Based on the results in model 1, the effect of a one-standard deviation increase in attendance leads to a 5.4 and 5.0 percent decrease in the probability of voting PSD in 1996 and 2004, respectively.

To determine the impact that efforts by PSD to win religious voters' support have had, model 2 adds left-right self-placements, while model 3 controls for left-right perceptions of PSD. Despite possible endogeneity problems (evident in Table 3 above), including both left-right self-placements and left-right perceptions of PSD still assesses their independent causal effects on

vote choices. The effects of attendance remain significant even after adding left-right self-placements and perceptions of PSD in 1996, but not in 2004. This is consistent with the findings in Table 3, in which the effects of attendance on perceptions of PSD are far stronger in 2004 than in 1996; as a result, the effects of attendance in Table 4 appear mediated by perceptions of PSD.<sup>17</sup> Comparing the effects of left-right self-placements in model 3 between 1996 and 2004 shows that the effects of attendance have strengthened considerably. Holding all variables at their median values (means in the case of age), a one-standard deviation increase in left-right self-placements leads to an 8.8 percent decrease in the probability of voting PSD in 1996 and a 29.4 percent decrease in 2004.

Regarding the effect of PSD perceptions, a one-standard deviation move to the right in PSD perceptions leads to a 17.5 percent increase in the probability of voting for PSD in 1996, and an 18.4 percent increase in 2004. The fact that the effect of PSD perceptions is only marginally larger in 2004 than 1996 suggests that the most important effect of PSD's switch on religious issues was the effect this switch had on left-right self-placements. Rather than convincing voters that the party belonged to the right, PSD convinced many religious voters to alter their own positions on the left-right scale to reflect their support for PSD (which belongs to the left). This is reflected in the fact that the effect of left-right self-placements is negative (individuals placing themselves to the left are more likely to vote for PSD) and much stronger in 2004 than in 1996.

In keeping with the argument put forth here, these findings demonstrate that PSD's efforts to alter religious individuals' perceptions of the party—and the effect these perceptions have had on individuals' own self-placements—have altered the appearance of the religious-secular cleavage on vote choices. While religious voters continue to vote for the parties of the right,

these effects are mediated by perceptions of PSD and their effects on left-right self-placements, both of which increasingly mask the appearance of a religious-secular divide (in keeping with the findings from Table 3). These findings, in turn, provide further evidence of the effects that parties like PSD have had on the appearance of such religious-secular divisions: not only has PSD altered both left-right perceptions of the party and individuals' own left-right self-placements, but these have, in turn, increased support for PSD among religious voters.

### **Conclusions**

The findings presented here have clear implications for the literature regarding the agency of political parties in shaping the formation of cleavages, as well as the literature regarding the appearance and stability of cleavage effects. Similar to previous research from the top-down perspective of cleavage formation and maintenance (Schattschneider, 1960; Sartori, 1969; Przeworski and Sprague, 1986; Torcal and Mainwaring, 2003; Enyedi, 2005; Evans, 2006, pp. 246; Raymond and Arce, 2011), the results presented here show that political parties have considerable impact upon the appearance or absence of political cleavages (even if important bottom-up conditioning effects—like the dominance of the Orthodox Church—are partly responsible for creating the conditions under which this party competition can occur). Focusing on the religious-secular cleavage in Romania and the efforts by PSD to win the support of religious voters, the results show clear evidence of party elite effects on individuals' perceptions of the political parties and left-right self-placements. Even more so than previous works, however, this paper demonstrates clearly how parties are able to shape the formation and appearance of cleavages and group-based effects on political behaviour. In transforming their own positions on the issues important to certain cleavage groups, a party can affect the appearance of cleavage effects on political behaviour—by shaping both the perceptions

individuals have of the party and, in turn, individuals' own left-right self-placements—as PSD did with respect to religious voters. Moreover, parties' efforts to shape both perceptions of the party and individuals' ideological self-placements can affect other behaviours, such as voting.

The results presented here appear generalisable, not only to the larger post-Communist region, but cross-nationally as well. Many CEE countries experience similar instability among party elites; based on the arguments and analysis performed here, party actions seem to explain why these countries show weaker evidence of cleavage-based political behaviour than other countries in CEE. Because this argument stressing the impact of elite behaviour accords well with arguments stressing party agency in the formation of cleavages in other contexts (see Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Torcal and Mainwaring, 2003; Enyedi, 2008; Raymond and Arce, 2011), the results would appear to apply beyond the post-Communist region as well. While the results of this study are bound by the fact that PSD was able to alter the appearance of the religious-secular cleavage in an environment where the terms left and right have not been well-defined, this lack of definition may be the result (rather than a cause) of switches in parties' positions. Rather than seeing the impact of parties on the appearance of cleavage behaviour only in contexts where terms like left and right are poorly defined, these results suggest that the more consistent definitions of left and right in established democracies may be the result of the clearer and more consistent positions taken by parties in those countries. The literature could benefit from further research examining this possibility in countries where the terms left and right are thought to be more well-defined.

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Table 1 The Effect of Religiosity on Left-Right Self-Placement

	Survey and Year					
	WVS 1993	CSES 1996	WVS 1998	WVS 1999	CSES 2004	WVS 2005
Church Attendance	.060* (1.74)	.115** (2.82)	.072** (2.13)	-.033 (-0.70)	.034 (1.00)	-.084** (-2.29)

\*  $p \leq .10$  \*\*  $p \leq .05$ . WVS refers to the World Values Survey. CSES refers to the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. Entries are standardized beta coefficients with robust t-statistics in parentheses. Other control variables not presented here in the interests of space.

Table 2: The Religiosity of the PSD Vote

Frequency of Attendance	Election Year	
	1996	2004
Frequently	37%	43%
Occasionally	33%	38%
Never	30%	19%

Entries represent the proportion of PSD support drawn from voters at each level of attendance in 1996 and 2004, respectively.

Table 3 Religiosity Effects on Left-Right Self-Placements and Perceptions of PSD – 1996 and 2004

Variables	CSES (1996)		CSES (2004)	
	Left-Right Self	PSD Perceptions	Left-Right Self	PSD Perceptions
Church Attendance	.251 (.076)***	.091 (.085)	.053 (.060)	-.228 (.113)**
PSD Perceptions	.035 (.036)		.186 (.026)***	
Left-Right Self		.043 (.044)		.244 (.053)***
Urban Dweller	.090 (.239)	-.900 (.262)***	.151 (.193)	-.969 (.249)***
Income	.106 (.086)	-.071 (.095)	.171 (.071)**	-.142 (.092)
Union Member	.666 (.244)***	.445 (.271)*	.322 (.292)	-.636 (.380)*
University Education	-.153 (.324)	-.882 (.358)**	-.090 (.231)	.100 (.301)
Gender	-.133 (.213)	.096 (.236)	-.097 (.170)	.432 (.220)**
Age	-.003 (.007)	-.005 (.008)	-.010 (.005)*	.020 (.007)***
Constant	4.265 (.668)***	3.108 (.753)***	5.107 (.448)***	1.869 (.626)***
Wald X <sup>2</sup>	20.88***	35.59***	61.30***	92.77***
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.030	.051	.015	.051
n	641	641	819	819

\*  $p \leq .10$  \*\*  $p \leq .05$  \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$ . Entries are seemingly unrelated regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 4 The Effects of Religiosity, Perceptions of PSD, and Left-Right Self-Placements on Voting PSD

	CSES (1996)		
Variables	1	2	3
Church Attendance	-.163 (.064)***	-.215 (.094)**	-.281 (.103)***
Left-Right Self-Placements		-.149 (.049)***	-.243 (.065)***
Left-Right Perceptions of PSD			.360 (.059)***
Urban Dweller	-1.307 (.270)***	-1.487 (.328)***	-1.294 (.354)***
Income	-.158 (.073)**	-.156 (.100)	-.142 (.113)
Union Member	.168 (.256)	.352 (.301)	.162 (.355)
University Education	-.712 (.394)*	-.658 (.430)	-.032 (.468)
Gender	.243 (.188)	.550 (.255)**	.310 (.293)
Age	.028 (.006)***	.034 (.008)***	.044 (.010)***
Constant	-1.633 (.609)**	-1.774 (.772)*	-2.647 (.964)**
Wald X <sup>2</sup>	63.46***	54.49***	72.54***
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.111	.144	.269
n	598	405	381
	CSES (2004)		
Variables	1	2	3
Church Attendance	-.138 (.052)***	-.088 (.069)	-.053 (.078)
Left-Right Self-Placements		-.369 (.047)***	-.525 (.061)***
Left-Right Perceptions of PSD			.255 (.045)***
Urban Dweller	-.232 (.174)	-.375 (.208)*	-.290 (.240)
Income	-.216 (.064)***	-.166 (.080)**	-.221 (.090)**
Union Member	-.350 (.245)	-.423 (.313)	-.295 (.352)
University Education	-.198 (.226)	-.116 (.248)	-.025 (.280)
Gender	.027 (.147)	.096 (.190)	-.186 (.220)
Age	.014 (.005)***	.015 (.006)**	.009 (.007)
Constant	.008 (.374)	1.827 (.550)***	2.342 (.607)***
Wald X <sup>2</sup>	57.31***	98.65***	95.53***
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.049	.159	.257
n	862	599	532

\*  $p \leq .10$  \*\*  $p \leq .05$  \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$ . Entries are logistic regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses.



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<sup>1</sup> While emerging evidence suggests that parties in post-Communist Europe are institutionalizing (Lewis 2006) and contesting elections with increasingly stable and ideological programs (Tavits, 2005; Bakke and Sitter, 2005; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2009), this is occurring to different degrees, with parties in Central Europe being the most institutionalized (and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union the least institutionalized).

<sup>2</sup> PD, which merged with the Liberal Democratic Party (a breakaway from PNL) in 2007 to form the Democratic Liberal Party, has moved to the right since 2004, abandoning its membership in the Socialist International and joining the centrist and Christian Democrat-formed European People's Party in 2005 at the European Parliament level.

<sup>3</sup> In the WVS, this is a ten-point measure ranging from 1 (most leftist) to 10 (most rightist). In the CSES surveys, this ranges from 0 to 10, left to right.

<sup>4</sup> This is an eight-point measure in the 1990, 1995, and 2000 waves of the WVS; a seven-point measure in the 2005 wave of the WVS; and a six-point measure in the CSES.

<sup>5</sup> In the WVS, this is a ten-point measure ranging from the bottom decile (coded 0) to the top decile (coded 9). In the CSES, this is a five-point measure ranging from the bottom quintile (0) to the top quintile (4).

<sup>6</sup> This is coded 1 for those living in a 'large town or city' according to the CSES and those living in settlements of 100,000 people or more according to the WVS, and 0 otherwise.

<sup>7</sup> This variable measures females as 1 and males as 0.

<sup>8</sup> This is measured as 1 if the respondent has obtained a university degree, 0 otherwise.

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<sup>9</sup> This is measured as 1 for union membership, 0 otherwise. (In the 2004 wave of the CSES, this includes ‘don't know’ responses and the large number of respondents refusing to indicate whether they belong.)

<sup>10</sup> Although the discussion of issues relating to moral traditionalism and national identity may not have featured as prominently as economic issues, these campaign messages provided important social cues to voters about the issues PSD represented, which individuals used to determine whether the party shares their social group's views; as a result, the impact of such cues upon voter behaviour should not be under-estimated (Popkin, 1991; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, 1991; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> While some may still wonder whether shifts in PSD's stances on religious issues were overshadowed by the party's shifts in its positions on economic issues, the results in Table 3 show that the effects of respondents' religious behaviour, not income, change in accordance with PSD's changes in stances on religious issues between 1996 and 2004. This demonstrates that those people most likely to be concerned with issues of traditional morality and national identity perceived at least some change in the party's stances on those issues.

<sup>12</sup> Frequent attendees include those attending at least once a month. Occasional attendees include those attending once a year at minimum and 11 times a year at maximum. Non-attendees include those attending less frequently or not at all.

<sup>13</sup> When thinking of these models as belonging to the broader class of structural equation models, one must ensure that the model is not under-identified; with a total of 45 observations (known parameters) and only 25 parameters that need to be estimated, the model is over-identified.

<sup>14</sup> Analysis (not reported here) of some other parties' effects—most notably PD—yield similar conclusions: party perceptions appear to affect left-right self-placements, and *vice versa*. While

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these effects have also altered individuals' perceptions, most of these effects appear to reinforce one another, thereby reinforcing the appearance of the religious-secular cleavage. As seen here, however, the effects of PSD on left-right self-placements and party perceptions have worked in opposite directions, thereby diminishing the appearance of religious-secular cleavage effects; thus only these results are shown here.

<sup>15</sup> The coding of PSD also includes the Romanian Humanist Party in 2004 (as these parties collectively formed the National Alliance). In 1996, the major parties included in the reference category were PNT-CD and PNL. In 2004, the Truth and Justice Alliance also included PD, whereas the party was not included in 1996. Although not contesting the 1996 elections as a coalition (despite the fact that they had been in government with one another from 1994 to 1996), results are substantively equivalent when the Greater Romania Party and Party of National Unity are coded as belonging to PSD in 1996.

<sup>16</sup> Including all party families as separate categories in the dependent variable and using multinomial logistic regression produces results which have the same substantive interpretation as the results presented here (and thus supportive of the argument).

<sup>17</sup> While attendance becomes insignificant when adding left-right self-placements to the model, the results from Table 3 suggest that attendance is not *mediated* in the strict sense of the term by left-right self-placements. The fact that attendance becomes insignificant suggests that left-right self-placements reflect PSD perceptions to a substantial degree.